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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BOGOTA 007312

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PHUM](#) [SNAR](#) [CO](#) [FARC](#)

SUBJECT: NEWEST PUTUMAYO ATTACKS TARGET GOC AND CIVILIANS
ALIKE

REF: BOGOTA 6237

Classified By: Ambassador William B. Wood for Reasons 1.4 B & D

Summary

1. (C) On July 20, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrillas began the second offensive in under a month against Putumayo Department. The five-day mission targeted nine municipalities, including Mocoa, the department's capital. As with attacks against military bases last month, the FARC amassed 300-600 fighters against several different targets in the area in nearly simultaneous offensives. FARC fighters destroyed several municipalities' energy sources, created road blocks, engaged the Colombian military forces in battle, kidnapped civilians, blew up a major bridge, and declared 14 local government officials military targets. Colombian military forces have moved into the area to respond and prevent escape across the borders into Ecuador or Peru. End summary.

Details of Attacks

2. (C) Colombian military intelligence was aware that the FARC had moved troops into the area in mid-July, but was not prepared for the various coordinated attacks. The first took place on July 19, when the FARC attempted to destroy the Naranjito bridge in the municipality of Villagarzon (Putumayo). It was left lightly damaged but still standing. On July 20, the FARC's 32nd front dynamited an electrical tower leaving middle and southern Putumayo municipalities without power. The same front began a roadblock between Mocoa and Pasto) a major commercial route for the department on July 21. Also on July 21, FARC front 13 destroyed the Villalobos River's bridge, making the Mocoa-Pitalito road unpassable. On July 22, 48th front fighters hit a SATENA airplane while it flew from Puerto Asis. The FARC took police officers hostage on July 25 in Piamonte while others attacked soldiers in the Santa Rosa municipality of Cauca Department. FARC forces burned vehicles, set fire to a tractor, and hit two HUEY helicopters July 25. Per local officials, almost 750 families have left their homes because of the violence. The FARC also declared Putumayo's governor and 13 mayors military targets.

Why now?

3. (C) This latest offensive builds on other attacks across the country over the last seven months. The most recent, notable offensive was the FARC's June 25 attack on military bases in Teteye (reftel) and other areas along the Putumayo border with Ecuador. That attack generated bilateral tension between the Colombian and Ecuadorian governments for weeks. Both agreed to hold ministerial discussions to resolve border security. Teteye attacks killed 22 soldiers and were the deadliest one-day attacks during the Uribe Administration. Uribe responded by overseeing the strategic response personally and calling for greater intelligence gathering by the military. In early July, the COLMIL dropped extensive ordnance in the largest Colombian Air Force mission in an attempt to kill Secretariat members leaving a high-level meeting.

4. (C) While the GOC's counter-attack was unsuccessful, the FARC may be retaliating for the bombing campaign nonetheless. Leading daily "El Tiempo" reports that the attacks may have been an attempt to distract COLMIL forces from hunting for FARC leader and Secretariat member Raul Reyes. The Colombian military targeted both Reyes and the 48th front recently and the FARC may have gone on the offensive to deflect those efforts. In either case, attacks build on the FARC's series of public attacks before the election to undermine Uribe's Democratic Security strategy.

GOC Responds

5. (U) President Uribe, MFA Carolina Barco, MOD Camilo Ospina

and Social Action Advisor Luis Alfonso Hoyos have visited Putumayo over the last week, and vowed to remain engaged. Uribe told the press during a July 28 visit that he had directed the Army and Police forces to focus on solutions to the impasse. He said, "I will not leave Putumayo on its own; if necessary I will move the government command here until public order is resolved." Foreign Minister Barco met with her Ecuadorian counterpart to discuss bilateral cooperation (septel). The Social Security Network, lead by the President's Social Action Advisor, Luis Alfonso Hoyos, announced on July 29 that the Network would offer social services in the municipalities of Puerto Asis, Mocoa, and Orito until the situation normalized. In Puerto Asis, for example, the GOC delivered 12 tons of supplies including canned goods, coffee, milk, and toiletries to replenish diminishing stores, and implemented an emergency response plan to assist the nearly 60 families displaced by the conflict.

16. (C) Military officials have played down events over the last week. For example, Police General Castro told the media that the roads were re-opened on July 25 and then was corrected as later reports revealed they remained closed. Colonel William Quintero Ramon, the commander of the Army's 17th Jungle Brigade, resigned his assignment on July 29 after the two Putumayo attacks, but other military officials remain in place. Per a July 22 Colombian Army Intelligence report, the area's residents are routinely both the victims and collaborators in FARC attacks, making detection and prevention more difficult. Colombian naval forces have stationed three vessels at the tri-border area of the Putumayo River to stop FARC forces from escaping across the border. Colombian military officials report that the road closures may not be lifted until August 8, further delaying economic recovery. The San Miguel Orito pipeline was scheduled to resume operations on August 1.

17. (C) Comment: The military is reopening infrastructure damaged in the attacks, but Putumayo remains a vulnerable outpost along the Ecuadorian border. The department not only has a petroleum pipeline to attract attacks, but also lacks sufficient troops to prevent the FARC's activities.

WOOD